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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000231

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA  
ALSO FOR IO/PDAS WARLICK  
P FOR DRUSSELL AND RRANGASWAMY  
USUN FOR WOLFF/GERMAIN/SCHEDLBAUER  
NSC FOR SHAPIRO, MCDERMOTT

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [UNSC](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [LE](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: SLEIMAN PLEASED BY CT COOPERATION, US  
SUPPORT FOR LEBANON

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d)

SUMMARY

1. (C) President Sleiman discussed recent US-Lebanese cooperation on counter terrorism and was pleased that the U.S. had approved the provision of Raven UAVs to the Lebanese Armed Forces. Embassy renews our suggestion that, if possible, Sleiman be invited to Washington before the June 7 Lebanese election. End Summary.

2. (C) Ambassador, accompanied by DCM, met with President Michel Sleiman at Baabda Palace on February 26. Ambassador praised Lebanon's cooperation on counter terrorism efforts, noting in particular the recent excellent work by the Lebanese Armed Forces intelligence chief (G-2) General Edmond Fadel. Sleiman was clearly pleased at hearing about the effective cooperation with the U.S. as well as the praise for Fadel, noting with pride that he had personally selected Fadel as G-2 in 2008.

AMBASSADOR INFORMS SLEIMAN ABOUT RAVEN UAVS

3. (C) Sleiman asked whether LAF Commander Jean Kahwaji, currently in the U.S. as the guest of CJCS Mullen, would return with "something" (a deliverable) for the LAF. Ambassador informed Kahwaji that U.S. will deliver Raven UAVs to Lebanon soon to help the LAF control Lebanon's borders, as part of the ongoing USG train and equip assistance to the LAF. Ambassador also reported that MARCENT commander LTG Helland had visited the day before to begin discussions of Marine Corps training of LAF personnel. She noted that the training would begin after the June 7 parliamentary election, likely in late summer or early fall. Sleiman was pleased about both developments.

ASAD, MUBARAK, KING ABDALLAH TO MEET?

4. (C) Discussion turned to the upcoming Gaza donors conference in Sharm el Sheikh and developments in Saudi-Syrian relations. Sleiman hinted that there is a plan for a meeting among Syrian president Asad, Egyptian president Mubarak and Saudi King Abdallah, to take place in Cairo sometime after Sharm but before the Arab League summit in

Doha at the end of March. He thought things were moving on the Syria-Saudi front. Sleiman said that in Sharm el Sheikh, PM Siniora will try to make contact with Qatari PM/FM Hamid bin Jassim, if bin Jassim attends. Finally, Sleiman agreed to discuss with Siniora the importance of assuring that the role of the Palestinian Authority is supported in the Gulf Cooperation Council's donation for Gaza. Sleiman thought Siniora wanted to support the PA, but also wanted assistance for Gaza to be used efficiently.

"WE HAVE NO DOUBT ABOUT U.S. SUPPORT FOR LEBANON";  
SYRIA; KEYTOUSHAS  
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15. (C) Ambassador informed Sleiman about the upcoming trip of NSC Senior Director Daniel Shapiro and NEA Acting A/S Jeffrey Feltman; the president immediately agreed to a meeting with them. Sleiman was aware of the upcoming meeting between Acting A/S Feltman and Syrian Ambassador to the U.S. Mustafa.

Ambassador noted that there remain key differences between the U.S. and Syria, including Syria's support for terrorist groups, interference in Lebanon, acquisition of nuclear and non-conventional weapons, and human rights situation. She emphasized that Lebanese interests will not be sacrificed. Sleiman was grateful but relaxed about this: "We have no doubt about U.S. support for Lebanon," he responded.

16. (C) Sleiman added that there was nothing new on when the SARG would name an Ambassador to Lebanon, joking that the Syrians will do it only when everyone stops pressuring them to do it. "They don't respond well to pressure", he

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commented. Sleiman also mentioned he will make a 24-hour trip to Oman on February 28. (Note: Oman has pledged \$4-5 million for Nahr al Barid Palestinian refugee camp reconstruction. End note.)

17. (C) Referring to the GOL statements denouncing the latest incident of Ketyousha rockets being launched from southern Lebanon into Israel on February 21, Ambassador noted that Sleiman's statement and those of PM Siniora and Speaker of the Parliament Nabih Berri had all underscored Lebanese support for UNSCR 1701. Speaking of Berri, Ambassador informed Sleiman that there was no truth to recent reports in some press outlets that the USG was working to keep Berri from being named Speaker again after the next parliamentary election or that the U.S. was behind Berri's bitter conflict with Siniora over the 2009 budget. She also noted that an article in the previous day's Al-Akhbar newspaper supposedly quoting former Assistant for National Security Affairs to former VP Cheney John Hannah was completely false. Sleiman commiserated, commenting on the poor quality of certain newspapers and media outlets.

COMMENT  
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18. (C) We would like to renew our request that we invite Sleiman to visit Washington in 2009, ideally before the Lebanese elections on June 7. Such a visit would underscore that USG support for Lebanon, and for the Lebanese presidency as a symbol of the institutions of state control, remains strong. A visit to the White House will also highlight that Lebanese moderates have a strong ally in the United States (and are well-placed to defend Lebanese Christian interests).

End Comment.

SISON